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What's cooking good-looking?

OUTDOOR COOKING ESSENTIALS

PLUS Plant some strawberries / Add edging to your garden

WORDS: CARROL BAKER

In backyards across the nation, Aussies regularly celebrate friendship and family by gathering the gang together, cooking and sharing meals in true Aussie tradition. And there's no better way to do that than with an outdoor cooker.

There are state-of-the-art six-burner cookers, woodfired ovens, smokers and, of course, complete outdoor kitchens, but by far the most popular is the barbecue. The humble backyard cooker has evolved over the decades and today there's a plethora of different variations. The backyard chef can now dish up tasty tucker that can rival restaurant-quality food. With a hooded barbecue, you have an open fire plate and grill when the hood is lifted; pop down the hood and the barbecue becomes an oven, so you can whip up virtually anything you can make in your indoor kitchen.

With sleek curves or straight, clean lines and cutting-edge style, contemporary barbecues have lots of visual appeal and they come in myriad styles with a variety of optional extras. Many are equipped with removable warming racks, glass viewing windows, optional rotisseries, wok burners

LEFT Image courtesy of Out From The Blue, oftb.com.au **BELOW** Image courtesy of Prestige BBQ's, prestigebbqs.com

WHAT'S COOKING?

When the weekend rolls around, there's nothing quite like chilling out with your friends and an ice-cold brew while you fire up the outdoor cooker

BACKYARD ESSENTIALS



LEFT Image courtesy of Satara. satara.com.au
BOTTOM LEFT Photo by Andreas Riedelmeier. pixabay.com **ABOVE** Image courtesy of Prestige BBQ's. prestigebbqs.com

and up to six burners to cater for large family gatherings. Barbecues are getting smarter, too; some have intuitive controls to help you cook to perfection. Of course, the more inclusions, the bigger the price tag.

Deciding on the right barbecue depends on what you plan on dishing up and how many you'll be catering for. Are you thinking large family parties, regular cook-ups with friends or small intimate get-togethers? Does the idea of a portable, free-standing or inbuilt barbecue hold more appeal? Answering these questions can help you to decide.

A barbecue can be fuelled by LPG, natural gas, charcoal bricks or electricity. Arguably the most popular option is gas as it's inexpensive and plentiful. If you have natural gas nearby, hooking up to that prevents you running out halfway through cooking. If you like the smoky taste of charcoal, it's cost effective and simple to use. Electric barbecues are great for small spaces — all you need is a power point nearby.

There are also other outdoor cooking methods that can wow guests at your next gathering. With a woodfired oven, no matter what you dish up, the unique mix of heat and smoke creates a scrumptious fusion of tantalising flavours. A woodfired oven may be built from clay, fire bricks or a range of sophisticated, refractory and insulating materials that create a thermal blanket trapping and retaining heat. There's a variety of finishes including rendered, brick or stylish contemporary stainless. Watching the flames and hearing the crackle of wood entices people to gather around — it's a great entertaining option or perfect for family pizza nights.

If smoky flavours tempt your taste buds, there is also a wide range of smoking options available. An electric or gas smoker is the perfect way to enjoy the tangy, unique taste of



smoked foods. Some have large smoking areas with multiple adjustable shelves, easy push-start ignitions and heat-resistant handles. Taking it one step further, barbecues are now often integrated into outdoor kitchens, with plenty of bench space and other features that can rival an indoor kitchen. Pete Ellis from Prestige BBQ's says there's an ever-increasing requirement for custom cabinetry in outdoor kitchens. "There certainly is a growing

demand for outdoor kitchens as part of an outdoor entertaining space," he notes. When designing an outdoor kitchen, Pete says the configuration is usually determined by how large you'd like the kitchen to be, as well as the shape of the available space. "The most standard are straight, L-shaped and now there are more U-shaped outdoor kitchens," he says. "Without a long, straight wall, L-shaped is a popular option, although homeowners with very

TOP Image courtesy of Lifestyle BBQs. lifestylebbqs.com **ABOVE** Image courtesy of Lifestyle BBQs. lifestylebbqs.com

large outdoor spaces are choosing U-shaped kitchens so they can include a breakfast bar." Pete says when designing an outdoor kitchen, there is a diverse array of styles. "I have never done two the same — everyone has completely different outdoor areas and completely different requirements," he says.



Image courtesy of Beacon Lighting. beaconlighting.com.au



In contemporary outdoor kitchens, the most in-demand features are dishwashers, sinks, fridges and even beer taps, besides the barbecue, of course. According to Pete, outdoor fridges are rapidly becoming a must-have in outdoor kitchens. "Outdoor fridges are in 80 per cent of outdoor kitchens I fit and around 95 per cent have a glass front. If you have a glass-door fridge and live in a humid area, you need heated glass to eliminate condensation issues," he says.

Single outdoor sinks are often fitted, so you can prepare and clean up easily without leaving the party. And there are cupboards galore — for storage, slide-outs for bins and more.

When it comes to benchtops, Pete says stainless steel, granite and engineered stone are all popular, durable options to withstand outdoor use. "Engineered stone is not suitable outdoors, but if you're fully undercover and the sun can't get to it, it's fine," he says.

ABOVE Image courtesy of Prestige BBQ's. prestigebbqs.com **BELOW** Image courtesy of Lifestyle BBQs. lifestylebbqs.com

Cabinetry needs to go the distance and should be made of high-quality weather-resistant materials specifically designed for outdoor use. According to Pete, that's not always the case. "Materials for longevity can be an issue. I've pulled a few cabinets out in canal



Image courtesy of Out From The Blue. oftb.com.au

BACKYARD
ESSENTIALS



Image courtesy of Satara. satara.com.au



ABOVE Image courtesy of Out From The Blue. oftb.com.au **LEFT** Photo by Gianluca Gerardi. unsplash.com



estates in the last few years," he says. "I don't think people realise there is moisture in the air whether rain can get in or not."

FIVE MINUTES WITH JOHN MCGRAN FROM LIFESTYLE BBQS

How has the concept of outdoor cooking at home changed over the last few decades?

It's evolved from a basic brick structure holding a steel plate over an open fire into something much more advanced. Back then,

Dad would normally incinerate some snags or chops and that was the job done. Not a gourmet offering by any means. Today an outdoor kitchen is intended to help the home chef serve up the most beautiful meals that everyone can enjoy.

What are some of the latest must-have features in barbecues and what are they used for? Sinks, fridges, dishwashers and woodfired pizza ovens have all become

very popular over the last few years. The "everything and more" that you would normally find in an indoor kitchen means the whole meal can be prepared and served outdoors and even the clean-up is taken care of without using your indoor kitchen.

What are some of your favourite tips for cooking on a barbecue? I recommend starting off on a lower heat and adjusting slightly as need be. The worst thing you can do is start on high because lots of meat over high heat is likely to ignite a fat fire.

If you are considering an outdoor kitchen, what should you think about when placing the various components such as the barbecue, sink, fridge etc? Get the services in the right location before you do anything. Water, waste, gas and electricity all have to be correctly positioned to ensure a perfect result.

What is the best way to clean your barbecue? All barbecues require different techniques for cleaning. My suggestion is to consider a professional barbecue cleaning company to come out once or twice a year. It's well worth keeping your barbecue in pristine condition and more people are doing it than you may think. In fact, this time of year, those companies are booked out for weeks in advance.